

## **Rules Of Rating For Hunting Laikas In Russia Tried On Bear**

In my previous paper, I described rules of rating for Laikas hunting in Russia applied to squirrel, sable, capercaillie, grouse and pheasant. Laikas also naturally hunt badger, mink, ferret, ermine and other members of the weasel family and are often used to hunt them.

All hunting Laikas in Russia originated from aboriginal dogs used to hunt diverse game and now their development as hunting dogs is considered incomplete if they have never been tested on big game, such as bear, wild boar, moose and deer. The same dogs who passed their exams on small game also should be tested on big game.

It is a common opinion among Russian hunters using the Russo-European, West Siberian and East Siberian Laika that a dog working aggressively and skillfully on the bear represents the essence of the best hunting Laika. Indeed, a bear-hunting Laika should possess several important qualities, such as aggressiveness, courage, strength and endurance and never should lose a desire to stay alive and hunt another day.

Laikas alternate aggressive attacks with retreats again and again to bay a bear. A pack of two good dogs trained to hunt together is most efficient.

There is only one species of bear commonly hunted in Europe and most of northern Asia, the brown bear, the same species as the North American grizzly, *Ursus arctos*, the brown bear.

The brown bear is a large, powerful and aggressive predator. It does not climb trees, only cubs or young bears do. Facing an aggressive dog, a bear would defend it aggressively and go its own way or stand it ground.

Trials for bear are conducted using a young captured bear. Single dogs or pairs belonging to the same owner, or several together, are allowed at the trials. A diploma is awarded to a single dog or to a group of dogs as a single pack.

During the Soviet time, regular hunters could not possess rifles. Only smooth-barrel shotguns were used. Bear hunters used round lead shots. Shooting a bear often was possible only from a close range, because of thick tree stands in a virgin taiga forest. This made bear hunting particularly dangerous and one good bear-aggressive Laika, or a pair, was very important. Most good bear-hunting Laikas start naturally but, for owners of these dogs living far away from bear populated parts of the country, it is important to find out if their dogs would be able to work well on this animal.

The following qualities of dogs are rated at the trials:

1. Reaction to tracks of bear, courage during the barking, aggressiveness, skill of biting and persistence.
2. Courage during barking at the bear is described as a behavior of a dog in the presence of the bear, style and confidence of the dog during baying.
3. Aggressiveness and skill are described as strength, precision of bites and excitement of the dog during the baying of the bear.

4. Dexterity is described as the ability of the dog to avoid strikes and counterattack of the bear. During barking a Laika must constantly keep an eye on the bear and be prepared to avoid to be caught.
5. Persistence during the chasing and baying the bear.

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At the trials, work of Laika on the captured bear is evaluated on a point system.

Reaction to the Courage during Aggressiveness and Dexterity Persistence Total

track of bear and during skill during bear

to the bear barking biting

15 25 25 15 20 100

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Diplomas for good hunting qualities are awarded to Laikas for a minimum number of points.

Degree Total \_\_\_\_\_ Including: \_\_\_\_\_

of diploma number of points Courage Aggressiveness Persistence

during barking and dexterity

I Degree 80 20 20 16

II Degree 70 18 18 14

III Degree 60 16 16 12

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Dogs not biting the bear, but receiving 12 points for their reaction to bear tracks and the bear, 16 points for their courage during the baying at the bear and 14 points for persistence can be awarded a Diploma not higher than Degree III. Such dogs are valuable, if used to hunt bears in winter when they are over wintering in dens. Actually, at this job, Degree III Laikas are better than very aggressive individuals.

Dogs that hunt bears in the den are awarded their diplomas only if a single dog is tried. If only one dog in a pack of two dogs bites the bear during a trial, the pair cannot be awarded a diploma higher than Degree III.

A bear used for trials must be at least 160 pounds; a male is preferred. Prior to trials, he should not be kept close to other domesticated animals or people so that he would be exposed to the bear's smell. Trials may be conducted year-round in hunting habitats.

Before the trial, a bear is led chained over a distance about 150-200 yards and then tied to a line at least eight to ten yards long. A ring sliding on the line must be covered with leather or another soft material to eliminate noise when the bear moves.

Judges are 40-60 steps from the bear to maximize their visibility. One of the judges should position himself close to the bear's track so he could see the work of the dogs on the track. Owners cannot encourage their dogs by voice or other signals. Each Laika must work independently without help from owners.

The dog being tried is turned loose 15-20 yards from the bear's track. If a dog does not start tracking the bear during the first five minutes of the trial, it is eliminated. Every dog tested for the ability to work on bear is allowed to be tried three times, for ten minutes each time.

The following deficiencies in the work of bear-hunting dogs are watched and recorded.

1. Reaction to the bear's tracks. A dog should find the track and then silently and with confidence start tracking the bear. Some dogs may not be sure in the beginning and then start tracking, which results in a loss of five points. Some dogs start reluctantly, try to abandon the track and return to the master but, after urging by the master, start tracking and find the bear. This results in a loss of five to ten points. Dogs barking during tracking lose eight to ten points.

2. Courage during the barking at the bear. A dog should run to the bear and attack him without hesitation, bay him with excitement and bite him at every convenient moment. If a pack of two dogs is used and the bear attacks one of the dogs, the second dog must attack the bear, bite him hard and divert his attention to himself.

Some dogs may bark at the bear with excitement but keep a long distance from him. This leads to a loss of eight to ten points. A dog may bark weakly and from afar, which results in a loss of 10-12 points. If a pair of dogs is tried and the bear is attacking one dog, the second dog must attack the bear immediately. If it does not, 10-12 points are lost. If a dog tracks well but, while facing the bear, does not bark at him until the master arrives on the scene, it loses eight to ten points.

3. Aggressiveness and skill. A dog dealing with bear tracks and the bear must show aggressiveness. A dog must aggressively attack the bear and often bite him hard when he retreats, forcing him to stop running. The dog can bite the bear anywhere, except the neck and the head.

Some dogs bite the bear correctly, but the bites are weak, which leads to a loss up to eight points. If a dog barks, but does not bite the bear, ten points are lost. If a dog does not bite a bear running away, 10-15 points are lost.

4. Dexterity. A dog must bark at the bayed bear at a close distance, attack him, bite and quickly avoid his dashes and strikes when he defends himself. Some dogs are too clumsy and cannot avoid a bear's strikes. Such a dog loses 8-12 points. Two dogs working as a pack poorly coordinated that interfere with each other lose six to eight points.

5. Persistence. A dog must bay the bear until the master calls him back. Some dogs stop barking, abandon the bear or switch their attention elsewhere, which results in a loss of six to eight points. If a dog stops baying and ignores the bear, nine to ten points are lost.

Natives of Ural and Siberia usually keep three to ten hunting Laikas per family. They all are good hunting dogs, but not every one of them works equally well on every kind of game. Those owned by hunters who regularly hunt bears are good bear-hunting Laikas. However, they usually do not hold organized field trials for their dogs. Their dogs started to bay bears naturally by one and two years of age.

Dogs that are afraid of bears are culled. Good bear-hunting dogs are always highly valued. For native hunters of taiga forests, a bear hunt is a great event associated with religious rituals prior to and after the hunt and it is taken very seriously.

In 1970, I traveled with a friend of mine to the Ivdel district of northern Ural, where we stayed with a Mansi family for a few weeks. For this Mansi, hunting a bear or a moose was the only way to get meat for his family. There was no transportation, electricity or groceries in the area.

The family had five dogs that worked well on squirrel and moose and none of them was afraid of bear. We took only one, their favorite male Laika, to hunt bear. We did not know how many bears he killed, but at the time of our visit he showed us 20 bearskins stored in one of his log cabins. He sold or traded bearskins to some visitors from the "civilized" world.

During one hunting trip, we witnessed an episode when this Mansi hunter refused to shoot a mature bear foraging in a clearing of very tall grass. The hunter saw the bear from a safe position on the cliff but, instead of shooting, he simply called his dog off and left. When we asked him why he did not shoot the bear, he answered that the grass was too tall, which gave a great advantage to the bear versus the dog. He did not want even a slight risk of losing his dog.

He was not a sportsman. This was an attitude of a native, for whom bear or moose hunting was a regular routine to obtain meat. Why rush to shoot now? Why not wait a day or a week and shoot another bear when it may be safer for the dog?

In the next paper, I will describe the rules of field trials for rating Russian hunting Laikas on the wild boar.

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